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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, April 10, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BUYING EGGS." Information from the Bureau of Animal Industry and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

--ooCoo--

As a rule, the price of fresh eggs declines in the spring until about Easter time. And the rule seems to be holding good this year, according to market specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. So right now is a good time to buy eggs freely. Nutritionists say that eggs are particularly good for children,-- so the more children who can have plenty of eggs as well as plenty of milk, the better, says the Bureau of Home Economics.

But we are particular about the quality of the eggs we use, and we can't tell much about that by looking at eggs in the store. How to make sure in advance that we are getting the quality we pay for?

That is a real problem for everybody concerned -- producer, dealer and customer. Here are some helpful hints on the subject from the egg specialists. They say, "Good quality eggs are clean and fresh; weigh about 24 ounces to the dozen; are uniform in size and shape; have strong shells of uniform color; have firm whites, small air cells, and well-centered spherical yolks of uniform color; are neither too dark nor too pale." Some of those qualities you can judge by the looks of the eggs, but most of them show up only by the candling test or by breaking the egg. If you hold the egg before a candle or any other light, you can see, for one thing, the size of the air space. That's important, for the air space is small in a fresh egg and large in a stale egg. There are differences in food value in different lots of eggs, but to know about that we would have to know the diet of the hens and the care they receive. As to the flavor of the egg, none of the commercial tests tell that. The proof of that pudding is in the eating.

Nevertheless, customers can get good assurance as to quality from the labels on officially graded eggs, and there are many dealers now who buy and sell eggs entirely by U. S. Government standards of quality as graded by official egg graders. The qualities observed by the grader in these tests (cleanliness, soundness, size, freshness, firmness, etc.) are shown by the shell, the air space in the egg, the yolk and the white as seen by candling. There is no law requiring the grading of eggs in this way, but egg producers and dealers can obtain the services of the Government graders if they desire them. The grading is done at the packing plant before the eggs are distributed to the retail stores. The cartons of Government-graded eggs are sealed with a label which certifies the grade and date of grading. The label carries the words "Certificate of quality, issued by authority of the U. S. Department of Agriculture."

Egg graders use the candling test. With trained eyes, and often with the aid of a little cardboard gauge, cut out to fit the end of the egg, the grader measures the depth of the air cell. As eggs grow older and deteriorate the air cell gets larger. Grade AA eggs have air cells no deeper than $1/8$ of an inch. Grade A may have $2/8$ and Grade B may have $3/8$ inch depth of the air cell.

For a Grade AA egg (U. S. Special), the requirements are: A shell that is clean, sound, and normal; an air cell not exceeding $1/8$ of an inch in depth and regular; a yolk well-centered, its outline indistinct as seen before the candle, and free from visible germ development (no germ spot) or any other defect or blemish; the white firm and clear.

The grades below the top do not measure up quite so well on these points, but are wholesome and may be equally useful for cooking purposes other than poaching, "coddling," or "boiling." There are special classifications for eggs that are more or less dirty (and therefore spoil sooner than clean eggs), and for eggs with checked or cracked shells. The color of the shell, however - whether white or brown - means nothing as to quality of the egg, but merely the market preference. New York prefers white eggs, Boston prefers them brown.

In normal times we consume eggs in this country at the rate of more than 21 dozen per person each year, and we produce more than 30 billion dozens. The four biggest egg markets in the United States are New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston. These markets received, in 1934, a total of 12,813,800 cases of eggs (30 dozen to the case), or 384,950,000 dozens. It is interesting to see where these eggs come from. Every State furnished some, but the biggest shipments to these four markets came from Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri and Illinois, each furnishing more than a million cases and Iowa furnishing $2\frac{1}{2}$ million. New York comes next to these Middle West States, with 807,600, then Washington with 787,500, and then Kansas, Wisconsin, Nebraska and Pennsylvania with half a million cases apiece or thereabouts, shipped to these four markets alone.

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